



FIRST THINGS FIRST

*The following recommendations were issued by **First Things First** for Arizona parents, early childhood educators and providers in the wake of COVID-19 school closures.*

With schools entering their third week of closure due to the COVID-19 crisis in Arizona, educators are striving to provide resources for families to support student learning at home.

Many of those resources involve websites or applications, and while online options may be appropriate for school-age children, they are not optimal for preschoolers.

Between birth and 5 years old, young children's brains are developing at lightning speed. The quality of a child's interactions with their families and caregivers impact whether their brain will develop in positive ways that promote learning.

Excessive screen time in the early years has been linked to a variety of negative outcomes for children including literacy and language delays, social-emotional difficulties such as lower attention spans, and increased obesity.

That's why the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no screen time for children younger than 18 months, and only one hour daily of high-quality programming for children 2 to 5 years old.

This can put educators working on learning opportunities for preschoolers in the wake of COVID-19 in a quandary. On the one hand, we understand that families need options for meeting their children's learning needs while parents need to remain working either outside the home or at home. On the other hand, we don't want to promote interactions with children that may not be developmentally appropriate.

This is not an impossible situation. It is a unique opportunity for early educators to build awareness among families of how young children learn and to provide resources that are going to support high-quality interactions between caregivers and preschoolers.

As early educators communicate with families, please:

- Emphasize that these are challenging times and there is no such thing as the perfect parent. Doing the best they can based on their specific circumstances is enough.
- Focus on talking, reading, singing and playing with young children as much as their day allows.
- When considering the online resources you are suggesting to parents, lean toward those that provide tips to parents on how to interact with their young child and/or require that the adult caregivers participate with the child in the learning activity. Lean on trusted resources, such as PBS, or those with specific early childhood expertise.
- As you use technology and social media platforms to communicate with your preschool students, please make sure you are encouraging adult family members to also participate, so they can replicate your efforts on their own.



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- Lastly, please remind families of our Arizona resources to help promote their child's health and learning. Those include:
 - The [Birth to 5 Helpline](#) – speak to a nurse or parent educator with your most pressing questions about your child's health and development.
 - First Things First (FTF) – the [FTF website](#) offers engaging and useful information and tips for families in a variety of areas including the [importance of play](#), supporting [language and literacy](#) and [STEM](#) activities for young children. On Facebook (@AZFirstThingsFirst), they regularly highlight the latest resources from a variety of trusted early childhood sources.
 - Arizona Department of Education – [Early Childhood Unit](#)